



The Russians
in the United States

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Introduction by Kenneth D. Miller

RUSSIA has been much in the public eye of recent years. Americans generally have come to look askance at the political experiment which the Russians have undertaken in their own country, and, consequently, are apt to look upon all Russians with suspicion and distrust. Bolshevism, communism, the red flag, revolution, the break-down of the family, and attacks upon religion—such are the thoughts that pass through our minds when one speaks to us of Russia. We are, therefore, not apt to relish the fact that we have some 400,000 Russians living in our midst.

But the present unhappy state of affairs in Russia is but the natural and inevitable result of centuries of oppression, injustice and cruelty. The former ruling class of Russia has brought these evils upon themselves. The Russians who are now in America came here, for the most part, just before the war. They came to escape the evils of the social, economic and political order of the Czarist regime. They came to find liberty, equality and democracy. Many of them found in America the realization of their life-long dreams and have entered fully into our American life. Others, and their number is distressingly large, were disappointed in America and disillusionized. They encountered only the seamy side of our life—the monotonous grind of industry unrelieved by

the normal joys of life. America to them meant the sweat-shop, or the steel mill, or the coal mine. They were cursed and they were exploited. Our America, the America of our love and pride, they never came to know.

Then came the revolution and Russia was free! And the common people had come into their own! The Russians here thrilled to hear the news. That the whole world joined in condemning the Soviets but made them more determined on their devotion to it.

In the years that have followed, our Russians have gradually become disillusionized concerning Bolshevism. They are no longer convinced that the millennium has come. They are becoming cynical, discouraged, defeated. Can we win their faith in America? Can we convince them that truth and justice and righteousness and love still exist and that we have a modicum of those virtues in the United States? We can, if we make those ideals and virtues paramount in those parts of American life with which they come in contact, and only then.

The Russians are a lovable people. There is a gentleness of soul and a kindliness of spirit in the Russian *moojik* which are hard to duplicate. They are an essentially religious people. The services in a Russian church are soul-stirring. They are making a real contribution to our economic life. We can make a contribution to their moral and spiritual life by making it possible for them to know a Christian America and to live as Christians in America.

In the following pages Mr. Duncan tells how one church is making that possible. The same results can be achieved in many other places. Is it not possible in your church—in your community?

WHAT one does not understand, that he fears. That was true of the primitive man; it seems to be true in this day of civilization. It is certainly true of the Russian in our midst. The Russian in America, especially in the larger cities, is a stranger in a strange land.

To be in America and not of it describes the lot of thousands of these people. Physically they are here in places that can be located geographically, where they labor and eat and sleep, but spiritually they have no contact whatsoever with the finer things that make our country what it is. The loss is theirs, to be sure, but the greater loss is ours. Too often we have made an enemy where we had an opportunity to make a friend. Every returning Russian to his homeland is a missionary of good will or evil.

The returning Russian, a missionary of good or evil

During the war, in the Russian town of Ufa, near the border line of Asia, I met two Russians who had been in America. Both spoke broken English. The speech of one was liberally interspersed with curse words. It was the English used in the mining colony of Pennsylvania where he had spent four years. "No," he said, "I did not like America. It is a —— of a place. A man is worse than an animal, even worse than in Russia before the Revolution. If that is American democracy, we don't want it in Russia."

The other was one of the commissars in the local government, and was keenly enthusiastic about the new Russia. He had worked in one of the automobile plants in Detroit where he earned "good money," had a "fine" home and where his children went to school. He had returned to help shape the new Russia like America.

The one returned to curse America, the other to bless. Each interpreted America out of his own experience. One was in America for four years but in all that time not much of America got into him. The other had been touched by the real America and went back as a missionary singing her praises.

Life, not institution, influences life

Making Americans is not a job that can be delegated to any one agency. The school can help, so can the text books, but most of all the teacher can. It is life that influences life. Even if a foreigner cannot read our language, he can read our life. He can sense our feelings if he cannot understand our speech. He can tell by our attitude what we think of him. When we treat the stranger in a haughty, superior manner, when we take advantage of the ignorance of the stranger, America is the sufferer. When by our indifference and neglect we pass by and let the foreigner shift as best he can we are simply hindering the growth and development of the Americanization process.

The church offers the newcomer the opportunity for friendly contacts

The church in the midst of these people in the cities should be the real interpreter of the best there is in our American life. The church should offer them a chance and a place to meet real Christian Americans. Just to be able to meet the members of the church staff in a friendly way and to feel the touch of human sympathy and interest means much to them. The landlord and the baker and the butcher are apt to be interested in their money, the foreman in the factory is interested in their labor, but the church should make them feel that she is interested in them as fellow human beings. On the staff of the Church of the Sea and Land are three

Russian workers: a minister, a nurse and a trained worker in religious education, supplied by the New York City Mission Society.

A service of worship and preaching is held every Sunday in the Russian language when a simple instructive message is presented. In no way is the preaching hostile to the Russian Orthodox faith. For the most part the majority of the Russians in our cities do not attend their own church except at the Christmas or Easter seasons so we are really dealing with a non-church going people, who are either indifferent or have ceased to believe in their church. Talks illustrated by stereopticon slides are often used.

We soon discovered that the Russian parents were very desirous of having a school where their children could learn to read and write and speak Russian. We heard about the Russian schools that "were teaching godless Bolsheviki doctrines" and thought it was a good chance to have a school where we would know just what the children were being taught. This school was opened and meets five days a week from five to seven o'clock. A Parents' Association was formed and is responsible for the salary of the two teachers and the management of the school. One of the Russian members of the church staff helps at the school and acts in an advisory capacity. About sixty pupils are enrolled with an average daily attendance of fifty-five. The fee is fifty cents a week which just about meets the expense of the salaries for the two teachers.

This school has done much to remove fear and suspicion towards the church. Doors in the homes have been opened to our church visitors that were closed before. Russian children in larger numbers are now attending the regular church school and Saturday clubs.

The church is cooperating with these people in meeting what they think is a great need.

Through this method both are learning to understand and appreciate each other better. The children are not made worse Americans for their instruction in Russian but they are learning to have greater respect for their parents and for their parents' homeland.

Introducing the stranger to the public provision for his welfare

Probably no city in the world has made such ample provision for her poor as New York, but the poor are not always aware of the fact. That is especially true of the Russians. Clinics, hospitals, recreation parks, public baths, free libraries, legal aid service and many other provisions for the welfare of the needy are at their disposal. But if the people know not about them or cannot express their needs, to them these wonderful agencies mean nothing. So it is that a poor Russian will go to a quack doctor and pay a big fee for poor service or go to a "cheap" lawyer and pay a big fee for poor advice.

To meet that situation our Russian nurse acts as a friendly interpreter and adviser. She will accompany the people to the clinic and to the hospital and recommend trustworthy doctors.

Responsive to spirit of friendliness

Our experience has shown us that the Russian Slavs will respond if we meet them in a friendly spirit. Perhaps in the beginning we shall have to go more than half way. They are human and have the same emotions of love and fear and pride and hate as ourselves. We must bear this in mind especially when "those foreigners" won't conform to our mould.

What is being done at this Church of the Sea and Land with the Russians is also being done with slight variations at other church

centers in the country. But there is a crying need for more such friendly service.

Russian population of the U. S. A.

There are approximately 400,000 Slavic Russians (exclusive of Russian Jews) in the United States. They are located chiefly in the states of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Ohio, Connecticut, California and Michigan. The chief city centers of our Russian population are New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit.

Presbyterian centers of work

Our Presbyterian Church has but three centers of work in which the Russian language is used: The Church of the Sea and Land, New York City (described in this pamphlet); one in Pittsburgh and one in San Francisco.



*The border and the motifs used in this leaflet were drawn by a
Czech artist*

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